

1996

"Drifting down the big still river": Huck and Jim's epic journey in the Adventures of Huckleberry Finn

Cynthia Anne Chidester
Iowa State University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://lib.dr.iastate.edu/rtd>



Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Chidester, Cynthia Anne, "'Drifting down the big still river': Huck and Jim's epic journey in the Adventures of Huckleberry Finn" (1996). *Retrospective Theses and Dissertations*. 16255.
<https://lib.dr.iastate.edu/rtd/16255>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Iowa State University Capstones, Theses and Dissertations at Iowa State University Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Retrospective Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Iowa State University Digital Repository. For more information, please contact digirep@iastate.edu.

"Drifting down the big still river":
Huck and Jim's epic journey in the
Adventures of Huckleberry Finn

by

Cynthia Anne Chidester

A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
MASTER OF ARTS

Major: English (Literature)
Major Professor: Charles L. P. Silet

Iowa State University

Ames, Iowa

1996

Graduate College
Iowa State University

This is to certify that the Master's thesis of

Cynthia Anne Chidester

has met the thesis requirements of Iowa State University

Signatures have been redacted for privacy

To Isis and Penelope, for their companionship and inspiration.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1.	INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER 2.	THE RIVER IN TWAIN	3
CHAPTER 3.	HUCK FINN'S CRITICS	16
CHAPTER 4.	THE SYMBOLIC WATER JOURNEY	28
CHAPTER 5.	HUCK AND JIM'S ODYSSEY	46
CHAPTER 6.	CONCLUSION	68
BIBLIOGRAPHY		71

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

This thesis originally began as a comparison of journey texts in Western literature, with an emphasis on classical and medieval works. I couldn't resist the urge to add *AHF* to the list, however. To my thinking, Twain deserves a place among Virgil, Dante, Chaucer, and other literary "greats." The tie between the *Odyssey* and *AHF* seems especially obvious: the main characters are clever and brave, they are subjected to forces greater than themselves, and they attempt to return home, whether that home is established or not. From a stylistic standpoint, both texts follow an oral tradition, and their main storylines are split into smaller episodes that alternate between the land and the water. Such a water journey is a wonderful metaphor for life itself. To paraphrase Herman Melville, we are all drawn to the water -- it is where we think best, and can reach our finest conclusions.

Eventually my thesis topic became a pared down version of the original, with a comparison of just the *Odyssey* and *AHF* within the context of the water journey. I figured it would be simple to find scholars who had previously drawn the same conclusions as I. To my surprise, although several critics have mentioned the similarities between these two works, no one has gone into any depth over it. Perhaps the world is not ready to hear that Twain is next in a line of literary giants such as Homer, Virgil, et cetera. This claim seems especially true when

we read two-faced criticism that praises Twain's exemplary style and creative abilities, and then in the next sentence states that his work is "vulgar" or "common." Although Twain was not formally schooled, genius does not come of privilege. Perhaps we are too close to Twain, chronologically speaking, to realize his importance. We know more of his life than we know of the ghostlike Homer or the industrious but enigmatic Chaucer, and sometimes it is easier to revere the unexplained. Regardless of past prejudices, the connections between the *Odyssey* and *AHF* merit recognition and examination, and Mark Twain himself deserves a reputation as a great literary artist. My thesis only brushes the surface of the countless similarities between *AHF* and the epic saga, but I hope it will help open minds to the possibilities and dispel some prejudices of the past.

CHAPTER 2. THE RIVER IN TWAIN

Mark Twain had a deep and sustaining connection with the Mississippi River that began with his earliest remembrances and is reflected throughout his literary work. He spent most of his childhood in the tiny river town of Hannibal, Missouri, situated on the banks of the Mississippi.¹ In his later years, Twain returned to the Mississippi for a tour that refreshed and invigorated him to the extent that he could finish the then incomplete *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.² His years spent around and on the Mississippi strongly affected him; so strongly in fact that he later claimed:

When I find a well-drawn character in fiction or biography, I generally take a warm personal interest in him, for the reason that I have known him before -- met him on the river.
(Twain, *Life on the Mississippi*, hereafter referred to as *LoM*, 125)

Twain's early home and his later occupation as a steamboat pilot provided him with original experiences that his creative energies modified and recreated in his fiction. He produced

¹ Milton Meltzer's book *Mark Twain Himself: A Pictorial Autobiography* (New York, NY: Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1960) contains many portraits, sketches, and photos of Twain himself; his relatives, friends, and contemporaries; and copies of his original manuscripts.

² For the purposes of this thesis, all pagination will be from the Penguin Classics version of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, edited by John Seelye (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1985), and hereafter referred to as *AHF*. I have chosen this version because it contains the lost raft chapter, and also for the reason that Penguin Classics are consistently faithful to the original publications.

several works centered around the Mississippi, of which perhaps the best known are *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, *LoM*, and *AHF*. Critic Stanley Brodwin claims that these three works comprise a "triptych" because they effectively document "the river that flowed through much of [Twain's] creative life" (Brodwin, 196, 197). Of the three, *AHF* stands out by virtue of its being the least autobiographical, as well as being the one in which the river literally "plays" the greatest role. Whereas in *LoM* Twain divulged his feelings about the beauties and dangers of the Mississippi, in *AHF* the river figures as more than a natural force; it practically becomes a character in an imaginative world. Twain explained in *LoM* how the river "in time, became a wonderful book -- a book . . . which told its mind to me without reserve, delivering its most cherished secrets as clearly as if it uttered them with a voice" (66-7). He later carried some of these secrets over into his writing in his creation of *AHF*'s Mississippi.

Unlike Huck's seemingly aimless escape down the river, Twain's childhood ambitions and his love for the Mississippi later drove him to seek his fortune on it. The "big muddy" played an important role in Twain's childhood and early adulthood from both an economic and an imaginative perspective. Small towns like Hannibal jumped to life at the approach of a steamboat in the early 1800s. Twain fondly recalled how, as a boy, he and his friends would watch the mighty steamboats cleave their way through the Mississippi's waters and stop briefly in

Hannibal's port. He described the "long and sharp and trim and pretty" steamboats approaching with "great volumes of the blackest smoke . . . rolling and tumbling out of the chimneys" (*LoM*, 38). Usually, "the crew [would be]. . . grouped on the forecastle," as they neared, much to the envy and admiration of Twain and his childhood friends (*LoM*, 38). It was a romantic image, and young Twain envied the deliberately nonchalant airs of younger crew members and admired the bearing and prestige of the elder members such as the pilot or captain. He and his schoolmates would watch the boat's activities with a considerable amount of wide-eyed awe as flurries of people bustled "to get aboard, and to get ashore, and to take in freight and to discharge freight, all at one and the same time" (*LoM*, 38). After the steamboat receded into the distance, young Twain's envy of the crew abated for the time being, and Hannibal returned to its former state -- "dead again" (*LoM*, 38).

Twain's boyhood dream was to live on the river as a steamboat pilot, for "there was but one permanent ambition among my comrades in our village on the west bank of the Mississippi River. That was, to be a steamboatman" (*LoM*, 37). It is no wonder that steamboats could create such excitement in a town like Hannibal and stir such ambition in the minds of the resident boys. Steamboats provided a quick and efficient means of transporting large amounts of goods in relatively little time as well as an affordable means for people to travel from one place to another. They all but replaced earlier attempts to use

the waterway -- flatboats and keelboats, both of which relied upon manpower to forge the waters. Flatboat commerce continued into the 1880s, but it was a one-way route with the southbound waters. Steamboats could easily travel upriver while hauling larger amounts of merchandise or more passengers. Anyone with some money could travel by steamboat: the less affluent slept on the decks and the wealthier slept in the cabins.³ The lure of faraway places and the importance of the commercial aspects of the job had a great impact on young Twain and his friends. Twain later fulfilled his ambition to be a steamboatman in October of 1855, when he convinced pilot Horace Bixby to let him stay on as a cub (apprentice) pilot.

Twain followed the most productive means of fulfilling his dream to live on the Mississippi, but his love for the river later took a different shape in *AHF*. Here Twain's boyhood dream of living on the river emerges again, but this time as an imaginative, adventurous vision of a man and a boy living on the water. Huck and Jim are wholly subject to the Mississippi's whims, as were the flatboats of the 1800s, and as a result they are carried farther into slave territory rather than to Jim's freedom. The water itself poses a threat to them on several occasions: it conjures up fogs, it carries them away from their destination, and it rips their raft away from a wrecked steamboat that they must vacate. At the same time, the water

³ For a more detailed account of Mississippi trade and history, see T.H. Watkins' illustrated book, *Mark Twain's Mississippi* (Palo Alto, CA: American West Publishing Company, 1974).

provides Huck and Jim with a highway-like home that offers a means of getting away from their previous lives.

Twain was careful to depict the various faces of the Mississippi in *AHF*, for he well knew the changeable nature of the river by the time he wrote his novel. As a young boy, however, he showed a propensity for mischief and seemed to ignore the power that the Mississippi exerted over him. He had several scrapes with drowning near Hannibal, which he later numbered as:

seven . . . before I learned to swim -- once in Bear Creek and six times in the Mississippi. I do not know who the people were who interfered with the intentions of a Providence wiser than themselves, but I hold a grudge against them yet. (Kiskis, 212)

Young Twain never lost his desire to be close to the river, however, despite his several scrapes with death. Even the loss of several of his schoolboy friends to drowning did not deter him from continuing to play on the Mississippi's banks or in its waters. Two drownings within a month prompted the young Twain to seek a more responsible lifestyle, however, and as he recalled, he and his friends "lost not a moment in getting ready to lead a better life" (*LoM*, 309). Such a course included, among other things, going promptly to church and Sunday school, giving to the poor, visiting the sick, and truly imbibing the messages of the church, but for young Twain, "within a month I had so drifted backward that again I was as lost and comfortable

as ever" (*LoM*, 310). Huck relates the same sorts of feelings in *AHF* when his father takes him from the widow's care and he gets to "[lay] off comfortable all day, smoking and fishing" along the river's edge (27). Like the inclinations of young Twain, Huck would rather be close to the water and enjoying life than be restrained by society's regulations.

Huck realizes the dangers that the water presents, however, whereas Twain apparently did not fully understand the Mississippi's strength until he became a cub pilot. For example, when Huck and Jim encounter the gang of thieves on the grounded steamboat, Huck is anxious to save them from their fate of drowning. After the wreckage breaks up and washes down the river, Huck attempts to find any survivors even though he instinctively knows his endeavors are in vain. Although it is "lovely" to live on the water, Huck also realizes that such a life could be potentially dangerous (*AHF*, 131).

Due to his chaotic upbringing, Huck is a precocious and practical child, and as a result his voice in the novel often reflects a more mature view of the world. The young Twain, however, was an adventurous child who found too many ways to have fun along the river to be concerned about its dangers. Twain recalled "borrowing" empty skiffs and traveling down the river with his friends, or making repeated excursions to Jackson's Island, an actual island in the Mississippi that later appeared in *AHF* and other fiction. There was always something to do on the river for Twain and his friends, and in and around

the Mississippi's waters young Twain found endless sources of recreation and mischief. Twain later recaptured some of his youthful escapades in his characters Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn, but Huck's character also voices the knowledge that Twain acquired as a steamboat pilot.

Twain used details from his childhood in creating Jim as well. For instance, Jim tells Huck a story about his daughter, who was stricken with scarlet fever and as a result of the disease became a deaf mute. This detail most likely came from an experience Twain had as a boy. Twain recalled how he and a friend were ice skating on the Mississippi at night when the ice began to break up. The two terror-stricken boys headed for shore, jumping from one ice-cake to another. His friend misjudged a jump and landed in the water, receiving "a bitter bath, but he was so close to shore that he only had to swim a stroke or two -- then his feet struck hard bottom and he crawled out" (Kiskis, 54-55). Twain arrived on shore without incident, but his friend's dip in the river "was a disaster for him. He took to his bed sick, and had a procession of diseases. The closing one was scarlet-fever, and he came out of it stone deaf" (Kiskis, 54-55). No amount of care could properly revive Twain's friend from his "bitter bath," yet another example for Twain of the relative insignificance of human power as compared to the might of the river.

Twain was not deterred from his wish to live on the river, despite the countless accidents and several deaths he witnessed

along the Mississippi as a child. His opportunity to fulfill his dream in the most logical way, as a member of a steamboat's crew, came to him after he had worked for several years in a print shop. Twain ran across a fifty dollar bill in the street, and decided to travel by steamboat downriver to seek his fortune harvesting coca in South America. During the steamboat ride down the Mississippi he met Bixby, and circumstances intervened to prevent his original plan from reaching fruition (namely, there was no boat that went to South America). Twain later played upon his misadventure in *AHF* when he created a bumbling "country jake" character who tells Huck and the King that he is going to travel to "Ryo Janeero" by steamboat (174, 175).

Bixby proved to be a strict teacher, but his business was a serious one -- the slightest mistake could destroy a boat. Initially, Twain thought the task would be easy:

If I had really known what I was about to require of my faculties, I should not have had the courage to begin. I supposed that all a pilot had to do was to keep his boat in the river, and I did not consider that that could be much of a trick, since it was so wide. (*LOM*, 45)

Through much training, Twain learned the intricacies of the Mississippi, but he also became well versed in its fickle and wayward nature. Its waters could be neither contained nor bridled, and often would slip their bonds, human-made or

natural, and create new paths for itself. As Twain predicted in 1907:

The Mississippi will always have its own way; no engineering skill can persuade it to do otherwise; it has always torn down the petty basketwork of the engineers and poured its giant floods whithersoever it chose, and it will continue to do this.⁴

In light of the present-day flooding on the Mississippi, we can see that Twain's assertion still rings true. He recalled that before the Civil War the river could shift so that a slave in a slave state one day could wake up the next day his own master in a free state. Another oddity was that a house on the Mississippi's banks might slip into the water when the earth under it fell into the river, just as he illustrated with the floating "House of Death" in *AHF*, as well as with the houses Huck sees further south that are hanging over the river's edge:

People lived in them yet, but it was dangersome, because sometimes a strip of land as wide as a house caves in at a time. Sometimes a belt of land a quarter of a mile deep will start in and cave along and cave along till it all caves into the river in one summer. Such a town as that has to be always moving back, and back, and back, because the river's always gnawing at it. (155)

Because of uncontrollable events such as these, steamboat pilots not only had to be very careful in plotting their courses, they

⁴ *Mark Twain in Eruption*, ed. Bernard De Voto (New York, NY: Harper, 1940), p 19.

also had to have the presence of mind to observe and avoid potential hazards. Bixby drilled every twist and turn of the Mississippi into Twain's head, and Twain learned it as best he could. Huck, in turn, shows a healthy respect for the river's power and a keen eye for possible dangers. The difficulties Huck and Jim encounter with their raft are ones that Twain would have learned during his years as a pilot.⁵

Despite careful navigation, steamboats did not always make their destinations. On occasion a boat's boilers would explode, and although Twain never actually saw such a tragedy firsthand, he lost several close comrades to these disasters. The greatest loss he experienced was his younger brother Henry, who also wanted to be a steamboat pilot. The two brothers often worked together on the same boat, with Twain training as a cub pilot and Henry working in a lesser position. At one point they both were scheduled to travel on the *Pennsylvania* for its run from New Orleans to Saint Louis. Before the return trip, Twain defended his younger brother from a particularly vindictive and cantankerous pilot named Brown. Twain knocked him down and proceeded to beat on him until someone stopped the fight. As a result Twain was not permitted to continue on the return journey with Brown (and Henry), which was a surprisingly lenient

⁵ In the past two decades a debate has arisen as to whether or not Twain was a good pilot, and in turn, how his success or failure influenced his writing style. For a reading in Twain's favor, see Edgar M. Branch's article "Mark Twain: The Pilot and the Writer" (*Mark Twain Journal* 23[1985]: 28-43). For contention that Twain was an insecure pilot, see Edgar J. Burde's "Mark Twain: The Writer as Pilot" (*PMLA* 93[1978]: 878-92).

punishment when we consider that Brown was piloting the boat when Twain attacked him. Instead of continuing on the *Pennsylvania*, Twain was assigned to the *A.T. Lacey*, which was traveling a few days behind his former assignment. Twain heard of the *Pennsylvania's* explosion before they reached port in Memphis.

Henry had lived through the explosion and valiantly tried to rescue some of the passengers. He was badly scalded from the steam, however, and did not realize the extent of his injuries until it was too late. Twain later presented conflicting stories of Henry's death: in one case he attributed it to Henry's injuries, and in another he claimed an overdose of morphine was the cause.⁶ In any case, Twain deeply mourned the loss of his brother.

Twain's boyhood dream was shattered, although he continued with his training and received his pilot's license. He learned many things during his training; the horror of steamboat accidents, the extreme vulnerability of people without protection from the Mississippi's waters, and the sheer strength and power of the Mississippi. Later in *AHF*, he was careful to present a balanced view of water travel by incorporating both its good and bad aspects, but the steamboats in this novel are generally portrayed in a frightening and dangerous light.

⁶ See *Life on the Mississippi*, ed. Leonard Kriegel (New York, NY: New American Library, 1963) pages 134-139 for the former; and *Mark Twain's Own Autobiography*, ed. Michael J. Kiskis (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990) pages 146-148 for the latter version of the story.

Interestingly, the Mississippi of Huck Finn's time would have been crowded with steamboats, but the river in Twain's novel is curiously empty of them. They are mentioned in passing as "slipping along in the dark . . . belch[ing] a whole world of sparks up out of [their] chimbleys," or as having "killed" themselves on rocks (*AHF*, 131, 73). Twain used ominous imagery for the machines to make them sound like monstrous living beings, which in turn prepares his reader for the beastlike steamboat that smashes through Huck and Jim's raft later in the novel. The steamboats of the Mississippi were the literal monsters of the water to small craft like skiffs and rafts. Large and powerful, they often could not be controlled by the men who operated them.

Twain was eventually cut off from his pilot's trade by the onset of the Civil War. After the war, railroads became the new road for commerce, and Twain's occupation as a pilot was outdated. He never outgrew the lessons he learned during his time on the river, and as we have seen, he modified his experiences for his fiction. The Mississippi was an old friend to him and a highway that showed him much about life. Twain's actual experiences on the Mississippi have led many people to believe that his fiction is a direct reflection of his life, but this is not necessarily so. His imagination played a larger role in his writing, and his experiences simply provided the foundation, or framework, for his texts, as is true for any writer. Perhaps Justin Kaplan said it best when he wrote:

Sentence by sentence and paragraph by paragraph Mark Twain was an entirely deliberate and conscious craftsman . . . But his larger, structural methods were inspirational and intuitive . . . The Holy Ghost seemed to sit with him as he wrote. (179-180)

The "Holy Ghost" -- the modern equivalent of a muse, or that undeniable force that takes hold of authors and shapes their work into forms that even they did not expect, unmistakably made its mark in *AHF*. As we shall see in the next chapter, most critics agree that the section of Twain's novel that takes place on the water is the most noteworthy. *AHF*'s Mississippi and Huck and Jim's water journey are prime examples of the "inspirational and intuitive" writing to which Kaplan refers, as I shall demonstrate in later chapters.

CHAPTER 3. HUCK FINN'S CRITICS

AHF has raised many issues throughout its history. Its standing in the canon of American literature has often been questioned, and even threatened at times, as we can see today in the heated debates over Twain's choices in vernacular. Several themes keep cropping up in the scholarship on *AHF*. In this chapter, we will examine articles that mostly agree on the importance and validity of the novel. These essays will either address the river's function in the text or spotlight *AHF* as an American "epic."¹

Most critics agree that the raft chapters of *AHF* contain some of the most noteworthy passages in the novel, and perhaps the most noteworthy in Twain's career.² Generally, critics recognize the river as the motivating force in these chapters, or the "glue" that holds the storyline together. Bernard DeVoto finds that the Mississippi in *AHF* "gives continuity to a series of episodes," and Jonathan Raban agrees that the "stability" in the plot variation between raft and shore "is assured . . . by the constant presence of . . . the Mississippi"

¹ In the late 1980s there was a shift in criticism to issues of race, gender, and ethical implications in *AHF*. This chapter will cover criticism that explores imagery and plot structure rather than essays which focus on socio-historic approaches.

² By "raft chapters," I mean the part of the novel framed by St. Petersburg and the Phelps' farm, i.e. the part of the story where Huck and Jim are predominantly living on their raft on the Mississippi. This label is not to be confused with the lost "raft chapter" that Twain originally intended for *AHF*, added to the manuscript of *Life on the Mississippi*, and then ultimately deleted from both works.

(De Voto, "Mark Twain's America," 310; Raban, 32). Most critics agree that the overall structure of the novel is shaped by the river, but beyond this most basic point there is much difference of opinion.

Impressions run the spectrum from a belief that the raft forms an idyllic, peaceful world of freedom compared to the postlapsarian depravity of the shore, to a view of the shore as a moral center and opportunity for growth and the raft as a depiction of wandering uncertainty.³ Of course, there is always room between the extremes for critics like Martha Banta, who believes that the shore represents stability, but more in terms of a struggle between complete personal freedom and the lure of society and home, illustrated metaphorically through the river and the shore, respectively. In all of these approaches Huck is ultimately influenced by the Mississippi, which takes him wherever it chooses, although it functions simply as a barrier or a highway but fails to provide a code of ethics or moral guidance for the characters.

Another way to interpret *AHF's* Mississippi is as a depiction influenced by the "realist" movement in the late nineteenth century. Twain actively shunned Romanticism, and his

³ See Jonathan Raban's book *Mark Twain: Huckleberry Finn* for an example of the river representing "social flux" and the shore offering "moral stability" (London, UK: Edward Arnold Ltd., 1968), p 34. In Lauriat Lane, Jr.'s article "Why *Huckleberry Finn* is a Great World Novel" he maintains that "the poetic tranquility of life on the raft" clashes with "the mob violence and human depravity always waiting on the shore" (*College English* 17[1955]: 1-5), p 3. Likewise, Marvin I. LaHood states "the sanctity of the raft is soon violated by the society of the shore [i.e., the King and the Duke]" in his article "Huck Finn's Search for Identity" (*Mark Twain Journal* 13[1967]: 11-14), p 14.

river, according to some critics, represents a tangible, natural body of water portrayed in an as true-to-life manner as possible.⁴ Does *AHF*'s Mississippi function as a plot device, a physical highway or barrier, or as part of a wish to preserve it in its most realistic form?

In their introductions to *AHF*, T. S. Eliot and Lionel Trilling maintain that these ideas are too limiting. The river transcends the obvious and takes on more of a character role in their eyes. In his introduction to the novel, Trilling, embellishing Eliot's earlier work, matter-of-factly states that the Mississippi is a "river-god," but clarifies that the "river is only divine; it is not ethical and good" (328,329). Later in his essay, however, he contradicts himself when he refers to "the subtle, implicit moral meaning of the great river" (333). Indeed, the river appears large and uncompromising in the novel, and seemingly surrounds Huck and Jim in giant indifference. Eliot states that events "merely happen, here and there, to the people who live along [the Mississippi's] shores or who commit themselves to its current" (108). Strangely enough, however, Huck and Jim always manage to come out ahead, despite the odds against them. Perhaps Trilling's "implicit moral meaning" of

⁴ See the beginning of "Mark Twain, 'Realism,' and *Huckleberry Finn*," by Michael Davitt Bell on pages 35-59 in *New Essays on Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (ed. by Louis J. Budd, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1986) for a good synopsis of the realist influences on Mark Twain and the anti-Romantic tendencies in his writing. Sherwood Cummings presents another angle, that of Twain's conflict between portraying a world ruled by deism or Darwinism, in his article "Mark Twain's Theory of Realism; or The Science of Piloting" (*Studies in American Humor* 2[1976]: 209-221).

the Mississippi is what propels Huck and Jim in the direction they seek.

Let us suppose the river is divine, but let us take it one step further and say it also has a conscious role in Huck and Jim's destiny. If we carefully examine the passages in *AHF*, we see that the river not only influences Huck and Jim's journey, it aids them when they need it. For instance, one passage that easily comes to mind is when Huck has made his escape to Jackson's Island and is watching the townspeople dredge the river for his body. "I was having a good enough time seeing them hunt for my remainders, if I only had a bite to eat," Huck says (*AHF*, 41). Huck remembers that they fire bread with quicksilver out of the cannons, so he attempts to snag one of the loaves passing by. After missing the first, Huck relates: "along comes another one, and this time I won. I took out the plug and shook out the little dab of quicksilver, and set my teeth in" (*AHF*, 42). Of course, Huck admits that the current ran close to the bank where he was laying, but it is strange that he was given a second chance in the same place. Since he could not easily prepare breakfast without being seen, Huck would have been stuck with his hunger pangs if the river had not floated a second loaf his way.

In addition, it is more than coincidence that, despite several wrecks, separations, and other various delays, Huck and Jim and their raft always gravitate back to the same place. Somehow, the river guides them all to the same general area, and

they find one another. For example, when a horrible storm causes their raft to break loose from the grounded steamboat where they encounter a gang of thieves, eventually they are able to escape on the thieves' skiff. As Jim rows them away, they run across the raft -- "a flash showed us a black thing ahead, floating, and we made for it" (*AHF*, 80). The delays they experienced on the wrecked steamboat, coupled with the furiously rushing water, are still not enough to separate them from their raft. The river brings them right to it, and another natural force, the lightning, illuminates it for them.

The river also reunites Huck and Jim at a time when they are completely separated. Huck is staying with the Grangerfords, and at that point he thinks the river claimed Jim as one of its many victims. Huck is confused by events in the house, so he goes "off down to the river, studying over" the strange occurrences that have been happening among the Grangerfords and the Shepherdsons (*AHF*, 122). A slave boy offers to show him some water moccasins, and Huck obliges him, despite a lack of interest. Instead Huck finds "a man lying there asleep -- and by jings is was my old Jim!" (*AHF*, 123). Coincidentally enough, the raft snagged in the same area, and the two friends are able to continue on their journey.

By unconsciously reacknowledging the river, Huck is reunited with Jim and with their river home, the raft. Had Huck decided to go to the woods to think, or to a different location on land, he would have missed his opportunity and would not have

found Jim. The river continually draws him to it, however, and as a result he proceeds on his journey.

Obviously, all of these events are more than mere coincidence. Huck and Jim are manipulated by a force greater than themselves, and in both a physical and spiritual sense. If the river is indeed divine, it does not pound along southward, blind and uncaring about the events surrounding it. Instead, it takes a genuine interest in Huck and Jim's journey, and makes every attempt to ensure that they remain together and keep their primary means of travel. The river is the god in the "American odyssey," as critic James T. Farrell has dubbed *AHF*, and Bernard De Voto, Lauriat Lane, Jr., and Lionel Trilling all label Twain's novel in a similar manner (Farrell, 322). The river within Twain's odyssey is one of the divine forces that directly affects the heroes Huck and Jim, and, as in other epics, it is a divinity that can be fickle and manipulative as well as kindly and generous.

AHF's guiding force is the river, and its scope, characters, and distinctly American bent set it apart from many novels. In 1912 Twain's associate, Albert Bigelow Paine, wrote "that as an *epic of the river*, the picture of a vanished day, [*AHF*] will rank even greater" in time (282, my italics). Lionel Trilling makes a better analogy with his statement that, as with *AHF*:

So, we may imagine, an Athenian boy grew up together with the *Odyssey*. There are few other

books which we can know so young and love so long. (328)

It is no mistake that Trilling compares *AHF* to another epic masterpiece, Homer's *Odyssey*. The two works share common ground, with the most obvious connections being that they are both water journeys and the main characters are male. I will demonstrate specific connections in Chapter Five, but as a general example let us observe how Huck and Odysseus share a likeness in assuming disguises and fabricating ornate lies. Huck is what T.S. Perry calls a "young scapegrace of a hero," and Odysseus is crafty yet noble, as well (276-277). Interestingly enough, Twain's library contained a translation of the *Odyssey* by William Cullen Bryant. Twain made several references to Homer during his lifetime, but many of them appeared in unpublished essays or in his personal papers written during the time he was working on *AHF*.⁵ Twain himself credited the role that other fiction had in shaping his work, thus we may presume that a link exists between the two texts. As Twain stated:

One isn't a printer ten years without setting up acres of good and bad literature, and learning -- unconsciously at first, consciously later -- to discriminate between the two, within his mental limitations; and meanwhile, he is consciously acquiring what is called a "style." (Introduction to Graff and Phelan edition of *AHF*, 21).

⁵ See *Mark Twain's Library*, by Alan Gribben, for more information on Twain's connections to Homer, including specific examples such as Twain's 1883 burlesque review of the *Odyssey* (Boston, MA: G.K. Hall & Co., 1980), Vol. I p 321.

Similarities between Huck and Odysseus therefore may have been a conscious or unconscious decision on Twain's part. Huck is not the only hero in the novel, however. Jim comes out from the margins and into sharper focus during the raft chapters. Lauriat Lane, Jr. argues that Huck and Jim together form a complete epic hero:

. . . Huck, though he still keeps some of the innocence and naivete of youth, has much in common with one of the greatest of epic heroes, Odysseus, the practical man. Jim also has some of the qualities of an epic hero. He has strength and courage, and he possesses the supreme virtue of epic poetry, loyalty. It is part of Twain's irony that in Huck and Jim we have, in one sense, the two halves of an epic hero. In Huck, the skill and canniness; in Jim, the strength and . . . loyalty. (3-4)

Jim is a devoted family man and longs to build a home where he and his family can live in freedom, just as Odysseus longs to return to his home and family. Whereas Huck has no family in the real sense of the word, Jim fulfills the requisite epic formulas with his wife and children, and Huck represents the adventurous portion of the epic hero. James T. Farrell describes Jim in the following manner:

Jim shines through the novel as a man with dignity, loyalty, and courage. Drifting along the Mississippi, he assumes heroic proportions, demonstrating by contrast that many of the white men surrounding him are cruel or foolish. (324)

Likewise, Odysseus' dignity is the more apparent when he is in company with the lazy and gluttonous suitors in his household.

Besides the epic hero, *AHF* must fulfill other standards to be truly considered as an American odyssey. Lauriat Lane, Jr. fits *AHF* into the epic framework in his article "Why *Huckleberry Finn* is a Great World Novel." One of the criteria Lane mentions is that the language must be poetic and written in a way that gives "literary form to the national destiny of the people for whom it is written" (3). *AHF*, he claims, is full of "passages of lyric description" that are solely American, as they are written in the southern vernacular (4). He rests in good company with this assertion, for countless other critics have pointed out Twain's unsurpassed linguistic abilities. Twain's unique descriptive, syncopated vernacular has given *AHF* a voice that reflects America at its most rustic and its most lovely. In addition, as Alan Trachtenberg states:

Huck appears before us, at least in part, within the conventions of an oral tradition . . . [Thus, t]he book is born for us, in short, under the aegis of a dual tradition. (89)

The very orality of the novel links *AHF* all the more strongly to the *Odyssey*, which was originally recited in poetic form. Likewise, Huck "tells" us his story, and conventional English grammar is sacrificed to the oral nature of the work.

Although *AHF* was written in a "common" tongue, its lyricism has prompted many critics to examine passages in detail. In

particular, critics have made mention of the following passage many times. I will refer to this passage as the "sunrise scene" in the future:

Here is the way we put in the time. It was a monstrous big river down there -- sometimes a mile and a half wide; we run nights, and laid up and hid day-times; soon as night was most gone, we stopped navigating and tied up -- nearly always in the dead water under a towhead; and then cut young cottonwoods and willows and hid the raft with them. Then we set out the lines. Next we slid into the river and had a swim, so as to freshen up and cool off; then we set down on the sandy bottom where the water was about knee deep, and watched the daylight come. Not a sound, anywheres -- perfectly still -- just like the whole world was asleep, only sometimes the bullfrogs a-cluttering, maybe. The first thing to see, looking away over the water, was a kind of dull line -- that was the woods on t'other side -- you couldn't make nothing else out; then a pale place in the sky; then more paleness, spreading around; then the river softened up, away off, and warn't black anymore, but gray; you could see little dark spots drifting along, ever so far away -- trading scows, and such things; and long black streaks -- rafts; sometimes you could hear a sweep screaming; or jumbled up voices, it was so still, and sounds come so far; and by-and-by you could see a streak on the water which you know by the look of the streak that there's a snag there in a swift current which breaks on it and makes that streak look that way; and you see the mist curl up off of the water, and the east reddens up, and the river, and you make out a log cabin in the edge of the woods, away on the bank on t'other side of the river, being a wood-yard, likely, and piled by them cheats so you can throw a dog through it anywheres; then the nice breeze springs up, and comes fanning you from over there, so cool and fresh, and sweet to smell, on account of the woods and the flowers; but sometimes not that way, because they've left dead fish laying around, gars, and such, and they do get pretty rank; and next you've got the full day, and everything smiling in the sun, and the song-birds just going it! (AHF, 129-30)

Lauriat Lane Jr., Albert Bigelow Paine, V. S. Pritchett, Charles Clerc, and Leo Marx, to name a few, have praised this passage as a supreme example of Twain's literary skill.⁶ Marx, who finds very little to praise in *AHF*, sees the sunrise scene as an example of fine writing, as well as a means of showing Huck's freedom from "the taint of social conditioning" (361). Charles Clerc provides a meticulous rhetorical analysis of this scene in his article. He states that "seemingly apparent technical deficiencies at the surface level prove artistically right in every way" (68).

Huck is prompted to poetry by the beauty of the river, despite his lack of formal education and overall refinement. As Clerc points out, however, Huck incorporates the beautiful with the displeasing (e.g., the smell of dead fish, or the "cheats" living on the shore) to provide a realistic portrait from all angles. In a similar manner, Homer presented a view of his time that spanned the spectrum from the noble king Menelaus to the pompous suitor Antinoos, thereby giving "literary form" to a now bygone era.

Despite all *AHF*'s obvious connections to the *Odyssey*, scholarship is strangely empty of any substantial work on their similarities. James P. Holoka's article "Lying to Laertes, A

⁶ Lane's argument "Why *Huckleberry Finn* is a Great World Novel," Paine's "Huck Finn Comes into His Own," Pritchett's article "Cruelty in the *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*," Clerc's analysis "Sunrise on the River: 'The Whole World' of *Huckleberry Finn*," and Marx's rebuttal "Mr. Eliot, Mr. Trilling, and *Huckleberry Finn*" all single out the sunrise scene as an example of Twain's finer writing.

Gorgeous Triumph -- Homer and Twain" is the closest thing to a one-on-one comparison, but the Twain novel he has in mind is *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*. Holoka compares Odysseus dissembling to his father to Tom's faking his death, and claims they are both examples of a childish desire to be missed by a parent. Huck also fabricates his own murder, but Holoka does not approach this angle, perhaps because Huck is escaping his father out of necessity, and is not concerned about parental grief.

Thus, the *Odyssey* and *AHF* are connected to one another by their oral natures and their heroes, and I will examine further similarities between the two texts in Chapter Five. Of course, other critics have provided relevant scholarship on Twain or on aspects of literature that can be linked to Twain. For example, although Joseph Campbell does not directly refer to Twain or *AHF*, I will use his paradigms to discuss the similarities between *AHF* and the *Odyssey* in Chapter Five. Likewise, in the next chapter I will examine the work of V. A. Kolve and Ronnie Terpening in the context of *AHF*'s Mississippi, while also exploring Susan K. Harris' work on Twain's water imagery. This chapter has provided a modest background of past scholarship on *AHF* so that we may continue to explore several issues in more depth.

CHAPTER 4. THE SYMBOLIC WATER JOURNEY

In Chapter One we learned how the Mississippi played an integral role in Twain's life. Knowing this often leads people to read the Mississippi in *AHF* as a mere extension of both realistic representation and Twain's own experiences. The river plays a much larger role in the novel, however, for it transcends simple depiction and takes on the role of a character. Twain's own Mississippi experiences, coupled with his creativity, gave rise to *AHF*'s Mississippi. As Steve Davis states, Mark Twain was able "to glide between fantasy and reality, allowing his imagination to work upon his blurred remembrances" (232). Although Davis is referring to Twain's Civil War experiences in this passage, the same holds true in his fiction.

We have examined the Mississippi's importance to the structure of *AHF*, for it operates as a means of binding each episode on the shore into a coherent whole. The river gives form to the novel and credence to the plot -- Huck and Jim are subject to the southbound waters, and thus their escape becomes riddled with difficulties. The Mississippi also functions as a type of deity and hence assumes a character role, a character that guides Huck and Jim or befuddles them with fog, a character that leads them to each other or pulls them apart. The river manipulates them, usually in a kindly way, and this facet makes it similar to the incomprehensible deities of Greek and Roman

texts. In this manner, *AHF*'s river follows in the timeless literary tradition of a water journey, a tradition defying geographical, cultural and temporal boundaries.

Water journeys, and river journeys in particular, are laden with symbolic meanings, and *AHF*'s Mississippi is no exception. This chapter will examine some of the interpretive possibilities but will not be an exhaustive investigation by any means. Exploring various areas of interpretation is merely a means of illuminating *AHF* as the richly creative text it is. The next chapter will examine *AHF* from an epic angle. All of these possibilities play into one another as tools for fully appreciating Twain's work.

Water is a universal symbol that may be interpreted in several different ways. According to Jean Chevalier and Alain Gheerbrant, water may be "a source of life, a vehicle of cleansing, and a centre of regeneration" (1081). A fourth function is water as a vehicle of death, which somewhat falls under the regeneration category, and which I will touch upon later in this chapter. The symbolic aspects of water therefore span cultures and centuries as a means of depicting life, death, transition, or purification. Rivers in particular "symbolize human existence and its winding passage through desire, emotion and intent" (Chevalier and Gheerbrant, 809-810). Thus, on a grand scale *AHF*'s Mississippi represents Huck and Jim's journey through life. They are subjected to dangers and periods of calm, trials of emotional strengths and physical strengths, and

they experience moments of confusion and clarity. The Mississippi can be read as representing the "winding passage" of life through which their souls travel.

Because the Mississippi is running water, it represents a healthy continuity and a clarity that comes of transition, change and growth. As Paul Diel states, stagnant water can be construed negatively, especially:

L'eau gelee, la glace, exprime la stagnation a son plus haut degre, le manque de chaleur d'ame, l'absence du sentiment vivifiant et createur qu'est l'amour: l'eau glatee figure la complete stagnation psychique, l'ame morte. (38-39)

Frozen water, ice, exemplifies stagnation to the highest degree, the loss of the warmth of the soul, and the absence of that invigorating and creative feeling which is love: frozen water represents complete psychological stagnation, the dead soul.
(my translation)

The Mississippi in *AHF* is continuously streaming southward, which in turn represents psychological awareness and growth for Huck and Jim. For instance, Huck is sitting on the raft when he chooses to be damned rather than jeopardize Jim's freedom. Before he comes to this decision, he returns to the flowing river "to think," for being on the river unravels the confusion of the shore and allows him to clear his mind (*AHF*, 233).

In addition, being on the river allows Huck and Jim to enjoy each others' company and communicate their thoughts and feelings to one another, a practice that is not fully

permissible on the shore because of their differences in skin color. Twain does not always go into explicit detail over Huck and Jim's conversations, but instead has Huck mention them in passing. It is clear despite Huck's nonchalance that his talks with Jim are a common and welcome occurrence on the raft. For example, when the King and Duke are aboard and Huck and Jim must play the roles of master and slave, Huck is quite impatient to talk to Jim, but must wait until the King and Duke cannot hear them. "Of course when they got to snoring, we had a long gabble, and I told Jim everything" Huck says in a rather blase manner, but his impatience beforehand has betrayed his true feelings in the matter (*AHF*, 229).

The closeness between the two, almost a father-son bond, grows stronger as they journey southward on the raft. Jim is protective of Huck, and often stays awake to let Huck sleep through his "watch" on the raft. "He often done that," Huck states offhandedly, but implicitly we understand that Jim is caring for Huck, who despite his precocity is still a young boy who needs a full night's sleep (*AHF*, 170). Likewise, Huck learns to respect Jim's dignity and look beyond his status as someone else's "property." In a particularly relevant scene Huck acknowledges Jim's feelings, and therefore his humanity:

It was fifteen minutes before I could work myself up to go and humble myself to a nigger -- but I done it, and I warn't ever sorry for it afterwards, neither. I didn't do him no more mean tricks, and I wouldn't done that one if I'd a knowed it would make him feel that way. (*AHF*, 95)

Huck and Jim's trust of one another grows as they travel southward and the waters warm. The river's motion symbolizes the psychological freedom they share, which is also illustrated in their conversation and in the unaffectedness they assume around one another. By living on the river, they are freed from normal restrictions that society would force upon them, and as a result they have the opportunity to form a friendship that transcends the color boundaries imposed on the shore.

Many critics have dismissed the ending of *AHF*, i.e. the Phelps farm episode, as inconsequential and disappointing. Taken in the context of the water journey, such dissatisfaction is not surprising, for Huck and Jim are no longer traveling on the river of life, so to speak. They cease to move, and hence cease to grow. In the symbolic sense, they are stagnating on the shore, and indeed, Huck and Jim both are all but swallowed in Tom's elaborate scheme to free Jim.

Obviously, the Mississippi is a tangible, real river that cuts through our nation, and Mark Twain made his way up and down the actual river countless times during his life. In turn, one could argue that Huck and Jim are merely characters in a novel that followed the covenants of "realism," but we can see that arguing such a point would be undercutting the true creative value of Twain's work. Twain could just as easily have had Huck escape his father by land, especially if he had canoed up a small stream or creek and then continued on foot. Twain

mentions a "creek . . . that went miles away, I don't know where, but it didn't go to the river" that Huck could have used for his escape, but did not (AHF, 38). In addition, Huck and Jim's journey begins before the summer months, so they are in no danger of encountering ice or having their raft freeze into the river, which in turn could be interpreted as "complete psychological stagnation." The weather remains warm, and grows warmer as they journey southward. There are definite reasons for the shape of the novel, and not just because the Mississippi is the "glue" that holds each episode together, as critics such as Bernard De Voto would argue. Twain had many choices when he wrote *AHF*, and his choices for the river have it function as more than a plot device. In turn, by using the river in the manner he did, Twain echoed countless other works which employ water journeys.¹

Now that we have examined some general interpretations of the Mississippi, let us look at more specific ones. For instance, Susan K. Harris examined the function of *AHF*'s Mississippi in her book *Mark Twain's Escape from Time: A Study of Patterns and Images*. She makes the claim that:

In Mark Twain's imagination, water and space provide a source of release from human restrictions. In his early work, Twain's most lyrical passages tend to combine images of water with references to escape, daydreams, or contentment. (72)

¹ For example, Virgil's *Aeneid*, Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, and Melville's *Moby Dick* are all water journeys narrated in an episodic fashion.

Most critics agree that the raft chapters of *AHF* contain the most lyrical descriptions, especially the sunrise scene we examined in the last chapter. Some critics, such as Van Wyck Brooks, even argue that through the process of writing *AHF*, Twain was able to escape the restrictions of his own life and live vicariously through his character Huck. Harris agrees that Twain's imagery divulges his feelings about specific situations, for example, his "boat and water references" which are used "to express his ambivalence about being accepted or rejected by the community" (Harris, 76). Similarly, we learned in the last chapter that critics have explained the breach between the shore and the raft in *AHF* as a means of depicting isolation versus community or freedom versus conventions. Harris cites Twain's letters, notes, and even speeches as evidence for her claims. In "possibly thousands of references," Twain referred to himself metaphorically "as a boat" alone in the water or lacking direction in a vast sea (Harris, 77). In this manner, Twain emphasized his feelings of loneliness and isolation, feelings that Huck expresses many times throughout *AHF*.

Obviously the use of boat and water imagery is not unique to Twain, and Harris willingly admits this fact. She explains that such metaphors were "stock . . . in nineteenth-century rhetoric," but claims that "in Twain's writings images of lost vessels appear too often, in too fervent a context, to be dismissed as mere clichés" (75). She claims:

Although he implies that the boat is lost when he wants to evoke a response from an audience, generally he uses the image to express his joy at the prospect of getting away from other people. (77-78)

Twain therefore used these images to emphasize his feelings of isolation, or to express his desire to be left alone. This is true of Huck as well. Although Huck relates how lonesome it can be on the water, he also continually wishes to be on the raft. The raft journey itself represents "a wonderful archetype of freedom" (Stephens, 15).

Other passages in *AHF* lend credence to Harris' arguments. Huck and Jim enjoy their time together away from the shore simply because, as Huck describes in his typical no-nonsense manner "[i]t's lovely to live on a raft" (*AHF*, 131). As the novel progresses and obstacles are thrown their way, Huck and Jim continually attempt to return to their life together on the raft. Huck describes an idyllic and pressure-free existence, where he and Jim are free to let the raft "float where-ever the current wanted her to" and enjoy each other's company and conversation (*AHF*, 130). The shore is a stark contrast to freedom and ease of the raft, for it is a "cramped up and smothery" place with too many rules and restrictions, as well as the place where Huck is disappointed and sickened by the "cruel" human race (*AHF*, 128, 254).

Twain used similar images to describe his own life, just as he used them to show Huck's moments of quiet and fulfillment. According to Harris, water is not the only image Twain used to describe his own desire for freedom and internal peace, but for this chapter it is the one on which we will concentrate. Harris explains that water also presents a means of describing timelessness, and Twain used it for this function as well. She cites a passage from Twain's work, and then explains:

Being suspended at sea is like being suspended in time; it creates the illusion that the flow of history can be halted and an idyllic interlude can be expanded to an eternal moment. By wishing never to arrive at the shore [from a passage in *Following the Equator*], Twain shows just how deeply he treasured the idea that time might be stopped and the indeterminacy of the journey extended. (82)

Similar "idyllic interludes" can be found in *AHF*, as well as the illusion that the raft is not moving, but remains stationary in the water, another example of temporal trickery. As Huck states:

. . . you feel like you are laying dead still on the water; and if a little glimpse of a snag slips by, you don't think to yourself how fast you're going, but you catch your breath and think, my! how that snag's tearing along. (*AHF*, 91)

Perhaps the desire for the "indeterminacy" of Huck and Jim's journey was what forced Twain to put his *AHF* manuscript aside for several years. Logically Twain must have known he had to

conclude his novel, but his wish to keep Huck and Jim forever southbound on the water prompted him to put the manuscript aside. His characters Huck and Jim, through whom he was expressing his desire for peace and freedom, were ultimately destined to resume their life within the confines of society. For some time Twain was stuck without an ending, and *AHF* remained unfinished until 1883. Ultimately, Twain left his ending open, however, with Huck's statement about "light[ing] out for the Territory" (*AHF*, 321). The journey continues, although it is no longer by water.

The temporal aspects of the river link it back to Eliot and Trilling's conclusion that it functions as a deity within the text. Like a god, it is timeless and unending, and human measurements are insignificant compared to its power. The river in turn influences Huck and Jim, and makes it seem as if their time on it continues forever. The river beguiles Huck and Jim's senses and allows them to suspend reality indefinitely.

Huck and Jim's home on the Mississippi is not always idyllic and peaceful, however, for Twain also presented the dangerous aspects of the apparently calm waters. Stanley Brodwin maintains:

. . . in *Huckleberry Finn* [the river] takes on its fullest symbolic weight as the road to freedom and as a force of nature integrating both beauty and ugliness, safety and destruction, good and evil. (201)

Brodwin agrees with Harris that the river represents freedom for Huck and Jim, but he is careful to point out the dangerous aspects of the water as well. From a biographical standpoint, Twain had adventuresome fun on the Mississippi as a child, but as we learned in Chapter Two, he also witnessed several tragedies that were caused by the powerful waterway. In turn, his character Huck recognizes the less idyllic aspects of the water. One specific instance is when he and Jim encounter the gang of thieves on the wrecked steamboat, which "killed herself on a rock" during a powerful thunderstorm (*AHF*, 73). Huck convinces Jim to go aboard, against Jim's better judgment, and they happen upon several men, one of whom is about to be murdered. Terrified, they try to leave, only to discover that their raft has been ripped away from the boat by the storm. The thieves' greed leads them back to their still-alive victim to clean his pockets, and during this hiatus Huck and Jim steal their skiff and escape the wreck. Thus, all of the men are left to the fate of the one; the storm breaks up the steamboat and they are all drowned.

Huck's conscience bothers him, however, and he decides to try to save the men before the wreck breaks up. To do so, he enlists the help of a nearby ferryboatman by means of an elaborate story, but the ferryboatman cannot reach the steamboat in time to save the men. Huck sees the wreck coming towards him as he makes his way through the water, and says:

A kind of cold shiver went through me, and then I struck out for her. She was very deep, and I see in a minute there warn't much chance for anybody being alive in her. I pulled all around her and hollered a little, but there wasn't any answer; all dead still. (AHF, 83)

Later, he and Jim sleep "like dead people" on their recaptured raft (AHF, 83).

The repetition of the word "dead" indicates how Huck feels about the river at that point; he realizes that the water presents a threat to his safety, and Jim's as well. Twain knew firsthand the river's apathy towards humankind as well as its tremendous power, and he effectively relates both the positive and negative aspects of it in his novel. His water images are not all idyllic, peaceful, and representative of freedom from restraint, simply because the Mississippi itself is not always so.

Twain also used a strange inversion of an ancient motif with his ferryboatman character. Normally a ferryboatman is the being who ferries people to the "land of the dead," but Twain's ferryboatman would have saved the thieves, had he reached the wreck in time. Like most ferryboatmen, Twain's requires some sort of compensation for his efforts, so Huck tricks him into thinking that a rich man's niece is aboard the wreck. Huck has nothing but his cunning to convince the ferryboatman to make the crossing. In another alteration of the motif, Huck does not accompany the ferryboatman on his mission, which ultimately is a failure.

The ferryboatman episode not only highlights the river's function as a vehicle of death, it ties *AHF* all the more strongly to previous epics. In Chapter Five we will examine similarities between *AHF* and the *Odyssey*, which lacks a ferryboatman to the land of the dead but does contain a journey into the underworld. The presence of such a character in *AHF* therefore merits a brief examination in this chapter because other epics typically contain a descent into the realm of the dead through a passage with a ferryboatman. Ronnie H. Terpening examined supernatural river crossings in his book *Charon and the Crossing*, and points out that a boatman of the dead is a virtually universal myth. Although the crossing is sometimes achieved by means of a bridge, many cultures depict "some type of water barrier" (Terpening, 15). For instance, although the *Odyssey* lacks a ferryboatman, Odysseus must travel through water to reach the realms of the dead, which Terpening postulates is because Homer conflated a "descent myth" with an "episode of evocation" (29).

In a different twist, Twain's ferryman would be a life-saver, not a soul-taker. As the episode stands, however, Huck is chilled by the evident deaths of the men onboard the steamboat. The water crossing does not take place in time to save them, and Huck's repetition of the word "dead" clearly shows how distraught he is. Since Huck refers to feeling like he is laying "dead still on the water" and not knowing where he is going "no more . . . than a dead man," it could be argued

that Huck has reached the realm of the dead in a figurative sense (AHF, 91, 89). The ancient tradition that Terpening discusses in his book is clearly present, however modified, in Twain's novel.

Besides ignoring the water's dangers, Harris neglects another key angle in her arguments by examining her images from a strictly secular viewpoint. She mentions the prevalence of water as an image of tranquillity, escape, or loneliness, but does not make the connection to the Christian church, which probably influenced Twain's writing. Although Twain questioned and even criticized organized religion, especially later in his life, he was raised in a strict Calvinist household by a devout mother. Such an upbringing would have familiarized the young Twain with the concept of humankind as pilgrims adrift in the sea of life, or perhaps in his case, down the river of life. In scholarship not associated with Twain, V. A. Kolve relates medieval iconography to Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. A common medieval concept was the Ship of the Church, a ship that sails through the "flood" of the world with Christ at the helm. There are also Christian representations, both visual and written, of people crossing water in a vessel to indicate the passage from life to death. It is common to illustrate humankind as pilgrims adrift in the "sea" of life, even today, for these "stock metaphors" continue into our twentieth-century vernacular. With Christ's help, Kolve explains, humankind may keep a steady path and avoid being "drowned" in the sea of the world. In other

words, by keeping focused on the hereafter, a person may avoid falling into everyday sins, which in extreme cases could result in that person's damnation. In allegorical terms, the person who avoids sinning would be upright in his or her little boat, which would pursue its straight and true course thanks to Christ's guidance and care.

These are images that Twain might have heard during the course of his Christian education, especially if we alter the language a bit and say that people who are predestined will remain upright in their boats. Interpreted allegorically, the water represents the sins of the world, the boat figures as the person's body, and the person within the boat is actually the soul. The steady course that the boat, or body, follows represents how divine aid and guidance keep an individual on the correct path. Huck and Jim pursue a steady course southwards on the Mississippi's waters. If we examine their journey under Kolve's interpretive device, we see that for the most part, they remain safe on their raft, indicating that they are following the right path. Their protection could be interpreted as partly derived from the river, which aids them and keeps them safe because it functions as the divinity in the story.

Huck and Jim always return to their raft, but when the Duke and the King come aboard, the raft becomes "a most uncommon lively place" (*AHF*, 151). If we read the Mississippi as the river of life, Huck and Jim's raft becomes their physical barrier from life, or their body. In turn, their physical

selves form the soul within the body of the raft. When the raft is infested with the rascally King and Duke, the journey is no longer as free and uninhibited as it once was, just as a virus invades a human body and makes it "uncommon lively" with the aches and fever that generally accompany a viral infection. In Christian terms, the sins of the world take human form in the King and Duke, and invade the body, or raft, which in turn makes the soul (Huck and Jim) uncomfortable and ill at ease.

The King and Duke not only break up Huck and Jim's journey, (which can be interpreted as stagnation) with their repeated sallies onto the shore, they also make Huck realize that he does not want to be like them. When Huck first lets them onto the raft, he is momentarily washed overboard, which can be interpreted from Kolve's standpoint as a fall from grace -- he is swept into the sins of the world. Huck immediately recognizes the King and Duke for scoundrels, however, and he and Jim repeatedly try to free themselves of them from that point forward.

The King and Duke's stay becomes a process by which Huck fully realizes how corrupt and perverse humankind can be, and thus makes a conscious decision to be a better individual. We must remember that Huck himself is dishonest and crafty, ostensibly out of necessity because he is a mere boy, but what might he become as an adult? After meeting the King and Duke, Huck grows "ashamed" of their scams, and discovers that telling the truth might be "better, and actuly safer, than a lie" on

occasion (*AHF*, 178, 205). He gradually grows in a moral sense, but he must experience the corruption firsthand in order to be redeemed.

Throughout these episodes Jim remains the steady man he always was, and we get glimpses of his loving feelings for his family and his protective ones for Huck. He fishes Huck out of the water when he goes "overboard backwards," which can be interpreted as his pulling Huck's soul back into line (*AHF*, 224). As a result, Huck learns about himself, in part through Jim's constant care, and in part through his experiences during his journey on the river.

Because Huck grows morally, the Mississippi also may be interpreted as a source of transition. It carries Huck and Jim on a journey of change as they both break free from their previous lives. Jim escapes slavery and Huck escapes his abusive father, and at the end of the novel their lives are completely changed in the manner they both wished. There are several quotes attributed to Heraclitus of Ephesus that concern the flowing and ever-changing nature of water as a device to explain the transitory nature of life. Two of them are as follows:

We step and do not step into the same rivers; we are
and are not.

As they step into the same rivers, different and still
different waters flow upon them. (Robinson, 35, 17)

By stepping into the Mississippi, Huck and Jim figuratively alter their own destinies. The Mississippi waters operate metaphorically as the transporting force that makes the transition in their lives complete, and the river contains the flowing "different and still different waters" that prompt their own personal changes. The running waters of the Mississippi symbolically "purify, heal and rejuvenate" them both, and they end their journey in a better state than they began it (Chevalier and Gheerbrant, 1084).

Unfortunately, Huck and Jim do not continue on their journey without the King and Duke, and the end of the novel is rather abrupt and contrived. Eventually they are rid of the King and Duke, but at this same point their river journey ends. If we examine the changes that they both experience up until they arrive at the Phelps' farm, however, the transitions are quite clear. Each time they "step" into the Mississippi, it remains their guide and transportation, but their perceptions change along the way. Thus Huck remains Huck, but he is altered from the person he was before his last voyage on the raft, he "is" yet "is not." Just as the Mississippi's waters are ever-changing, so Huck is growing physically, emotionally, spiritually, and morally.

CHAPTER 5. HUCK AND JIM'S ODYSSEY

Similarities between Homer's *Odyssey* and Twain's *AHF*, as we learned in Chapter Three, have prompted many critics to draw connections between the two works. For instance, Lauriat Lane, Jr. compares Huck to Odysseus, and Lionel Trilling claims the work has such national importance that an American reading *AHF* can be compared to an ancient Athenian reading the *Odyssey*. Sadly, the comparisons end with a mere mention of Homer's work with few details to support the assertions.

A comparison of the two texts deserves in-depth examination, however, especially when we consider that Twain most likely read some or all of the *Odyssey* as he worked on *AHF*. His "realistic mythology" bears striking resemblances to its predecessor in a number of ways (Brodwin, 201). It is hard to tell whether Twain was influenced by Homer's work, or whether he was working with an ancient and unconscious tradition involving water journeys and heroic survival. The intent of this chapter is not to answer this question, nor to "prove" that *AHF* and the *Odyssey* share the same storylines, the purpose is simply to compare the two for the sake of showcasing *AHF* as an American epic.¹ Twain's work follows in a long and well-established literary tradition, although his is a modified, modernized, and

¹ All quotes from the *Odyssey* are from a later edition of the same translation Twain owned, William Cullen Bryant's *The Odyssey of Homer* (Boston, MA: James R. Osgood and Company, 1873), hereafter referred to as *O*.

distinctly antebellum American viewpoint. As Stanley Brodwin states, the "major achievement" of *AHF* is "its universalization of an essentially regional portrait of America and its democratic 'heroes'" (198).

Regardless of the temporal and cultural gap between the two, *AHF* and the *Odyssey* have much common ground that may be examined through the lens of Joseph Campbell's heroic journey archetype. Campbell argues for a universality among hero journeys, a universality which he examines among several diverse cultures to lend credibility to his claim. To illustrate the broad-reaching effects of the heroic journey archetype, Campbell includes Western, Eastern, Native American and African mythic figures in his arguments. He also incorporates dream interpretation into his analyses in order to demonstrate the unconscious leaning toward the hero journey as an archetype. This archetype stands before us as an ageless, timeless, human means of depicting a large-scale metaphor for life itself, in all its trials, joys, difficulties, and discoveries.

Campbell breaks such a journey down into its integral parts, and then examines how each part operates in different cultures' hero journeys and dreams of voyages. He maintains that the hero typically goes through three stages: departure, initiation, and return. The initiation process is a transitional one, and as we learned in the last chapter, Huck experiences several changes during his journey down the river. Odysseus also changes during his journey. He learns not to

anticipate hospitality from strangers, as I will demonstrate later, and he learns not to reveal himself or his motives to anyone, mortal or immortal.

Odysseus experiences the return stage of Campbell's outline and emerges triumphant as he regains his household. The process by which he reinstates himself can also be viewed as part of the initiation stage, since he must conceal and then prove his identity before taking his rightful place in Ithaca. Huck, however, has nowhere to return from his journey. His biological family members are all deceased, and although he has wealth, he does not truly have a place where he may belong. As I stated earlier, in this sense as a metaphor for life *AHF* is an accurate reflection, as there can never be a definitive end while the hero is still living.

In this sense as well, *AHF* emerges as an distinctly American epic. Lauriat Lane, Jr. claims:

The theme of travel and adventure is characteristically American, and in Twain's day it was still a reality of everyday life. The country was still very much on the move, and during the novel Huck is moving with it. (3)

The open ending with Huck preparing himself to head westward reflects the expansion of a young nation. During Huck's time the country was nearing its centennial. Even today, with our west being "won" and transformed into large cities awash in electric lights, there remains the lingering question of what

comes next. In this sense, it is impossible to write the "return" of the hero in an American epic. Ours is a nation built on expectations, and although the land has been conquered, other frontiers remain. Agriculture and exploration turned to industry and real estate, and now technology looms on the horizon as the newest frontier. Like Huck, we continue to "light out for the Territory," whether the Territory is space travel, computer technology, or genetic engineering (*AHF*, 321). Our nation's future has no "return" -- it cannot be written. As a result, the American epic must necessarily end on an incomplete note.

This is not to say that *AHF* does not fit other criteria in Campbell's archetype. For instance, Campbell would most likely view the Mississippi as Huck and Jim's supernatural guide, another typical component in the hero journey. Odysseus is primarily helped by the goddess Athena, and as we saw in Chapter Two, the Mississippi is the force that propels Huck and Jim on their voyage. It is also through the river's power that Huck begins his journey towards self-discovery. Campbell states that once the hero begins the journey:

. . . the hero moves in a dream landscape of curiously fluid, ambiguous forms, where [s/]he must survive a succession of trials. This is a favorite phase of the myth-adventure. It has produced a world literature of miraculous tests and ordeals. The hero is covertly aided by the advice, amulets, and secret agents of the supernatural helper whom [s/]he met before [the] entrance into this region. (97)

The "supernatural helper" in Huck and Jim's world is the Mississippi, for it keeps them together and provides them with a home. Likewise, Athena aids Odysseus so that he eventually reaches his destination.

The guiding force of the hero journey is difficult to define in specific terms. Campbell describes it as:

Protective and dangerous, motherly and fatherly at the same time, this supernatural principle of guardianship and direction unites in itself all the ambiguities of the unconscious--thus signifying the support of our conscious personality by the other, larger system, but also the inscrutability of the guide that we are following. (73)

We have already examined how the Mississippi functions in both a kindly and destructive way during Huck and Jim's voyage, thus operating in an incomprehensible fashion. The "inscrutability" of the guide, whether it be a river or a deity, is perhaps what makes the hero journey much like life itself. The reasoning behind the trials cannot be understood, but the outcome of the journey remains in the hero's best interests. Later in this chapter I will focus on some of the specific trials that Huck, Jim and Odysseus face.

Campbell also explains that a hero journey may "string a number of independent cycles into a single series (as in the Odyssey)" (246). *AHF* has been repeatedly criticized as simply being a "string of anecdotes" without much substance, but we can

see that Twain was working with a means of depicting the hero voyage that follows an oral tradition. Cyclic storytelling is typical among oral cultures, and since "Huck appears before us, at least in part, within the conventions of an oral tradition," he uses the cyclical manner of telling his stories within the larger story (Trachtenberg, 89). As Campbell notes, the *Odyssey* progresses along the same lines.

There are many general similarities between Huck's story and Odysseus' story. Huck and Odysseus are both clever and fabricate ornate lies about themselves in order to avoid revealing their true identities. Jim and Odysseus also share similarities, for they are both strong, brave men with a devotion to their families and a desire to be reunited with them. As we saw in Chapter Three, Lauriat Lane, Jr. claims that Huck and Jim together form an epic "whole," that is, their character traits combined form the traditional epic hero. Besides strength and composure, Jim shares the epic hero's desire to build a home:

He was saying how the first thing he would do when he got to a free State he would go to saving up money and never spend a single cent, and when he got enough he would buy his wife, which was owned on a farm close to where Miss Watson lived; and then they would both work to buy the two children, and if their master wouldn't sell them, they'd get an Ab'litionist to go and steal them. (AHF, 97-8)

Huck wants to travel indefinitely, as evidenced by his statement at the end of the novel: "I got to light out for the Territory"

(*AHF*, 321). He has no interest in settling down and making a home for himself, but as a man with a family, Jim longs to be able to be responsible for his own wife and children. Thus we have another example of the two halves of the epic hero: the desire for travel and discovery in Huck, and in Jim the wish to build a secure home for his family.

As the world's "melting pot," it is nearly impossible to write an American epic that "gives literary form to the national destiny of the people for whom it is written" (Lane, 3). Part of the difficulty in defining a truly American epic is that we are a nation of many cultures. Although European standards prevail, subcultures are a strong and thriving part of our country's history. Twain not only had the opportunity to make the acquaintance of many African Americans in his lifetime, he also encountered Native American tribal peoples and Chinese immigrants during his frontier days. He spent time amongst the "lower classes" of raftsmen and miners, and held dinners at his house in Connecticut for those in "high society." In short, Twain had a firsthand view of our nation from many of its various angles. Whereas it seems impossible to create an epic hero who could encompass some or all of the expansiveness of American culture, *AHF* successfully bypasses some of this difficulty in having two heroes, both of whom are quite different.

One of the best points of *AHF*, as Stanley Brodwin points out, is "its universalization of an essentially regional

portrait of America and its democratic 'heroes'" (198). In *AHF*, Huck and Jim become the "universal" representatives of America as a whole. Brodwin's choice of the word "democratic" is especially relevant in that Jim is pursuing his freedom, which in turn is the whole basis of our country's existence. Jim mentions his newfound liberty when he states "I's rich now, come to look at it. I owns myself" (*AHF*, 52). Jim and Huck become their own masters and are free to pursue their lives in the manner they wish at the end of the novel.

Jim desires a personal freedom that we recognize today as his constitutional right. Jim is also loyal and kindhearted, which are prerequisites for a faithful servant. If we compare Jim to Eumaios in the *Odyssey*, however, we clearly see how Jim reflects American values, just as Eumaios illustrates the desired traits of an Ithacan servant.

The *Odyssey* is structured for the norms of a bygone society. Eumaios knows his "place" in society, and accordingly remains a loyal servant to his "master" Odysseus. His faithfulness is made the more apparent in that he tells the disguised Odysseus how he longs for his master's return, not realizing that Odysseus is listening to everything he says. Eumaios remains a true servant even after his master is absent for many years.

Jim sacrifices his dearly bought freedom when he helps a wounded Tom Sawyer at the end of *AHF*. Jim's actions are prompted by a generous heart more than an inherent

acknowledgement of his "place" in society, however, for his behavior before this event clearly demonstrates a strong desire for personal freedom. Jim's actions to gain his liberty remind us of the ideals upon which our nation was founded. He does not acknowledge his function as a slave in his society. Instead he values his rights as an individual, which is in direct contrast to Eumaios' submission to cultural norms. As a result, we see *AHF*'s distinctly American bearing, for it illustrates the value of the individual in society and the importance of personal freedom. The *Odyssey* reflects the conventions of its society, that is, a place for everyone and everyone in their place. *AHF* illustrates America's past convention of slavery, but within the context of the individual's freedom. Its form not only allows us to reflect upon our past, but allows us to consider the ideals and values upon which our nation was founded.

Despite the contrast between cultures in the *Odyssey* and *AHF*, Huck, Jim, and Odysseus all share many similarities. For instance, they all have disadvantages in their dealings with other beings along their journeys. Huck is a mere boy and implicitly admits he could handle situations better if he were "big enough" (*AHF*, 232). For instance, Huck would not be questioned as much about Jim being his slave if he were an adult, and the King and Duke most certainly would not have been able to sell Jim as easily. Odysseus is faced with similar problems during his journey, for he must face deities and monsters much stronger and larger than himself. The Cyclops

refers to him as a "mere weakling, insignificant/And small of stature" (*O*, I.197). Jim also shares a likeness to Odysseus, for he is a black man traveling in slave territory, just as Odysseus is a stranger traveling in strange lands who can never be sure whether the beings he encounters will capture and imprison him.

To compensate for their disadvantages, Huck and Odysseus take on disguises and invent new identities. Jim reacts differently due to his specific circumstances -- he basically conceals himself during his journey to avoid being captured by his socially recognized "superiors." Jim also takes on various disguises like that of the "Mad Arab," or plays roles, such as that of an aristocratic prisoner, but the difference in these cases is that Jim follows the instructions of others. When he must rely on himself, however, Jim actively takes control of his own destiny. For example, he hides under the surface of the water near the raft to avoid being captured by men that Huck ultimately repels with a smallpox story.

There are more specific similarities between the two texts, however. For instance, one of the common motifs in a journey text is a section where the hero is incarcerated for a period of time. Campbell explores this motif in his section headed "The Belly of the Whale." He explains that such a turn in the plot represents "a form of self-annihilation," and results in a rebirth of the hero, who is able to "'attain a higher grade of

nature'" as a result (91, 92). This motif occurs in both *AHF* and the *Odyssey*.

Odysseus, anticipating "hospitality," takes some of his men to the cave of the Cyclops (*O*, I.185). Instead, the huge Cyclops holds them all captive in his cave, the entrance to which he seals with a massive boulder. In a strange perversion of hospitality, the Cyclops routinely eats Odysseus' men for dinner thereafter. Odysseus knows he cannot slay the Cyclops, because he is unable to move the boulder barring the entrance to the cave, so instead he thinks of a cunning plan for escape that plays upon the Cyclops' gluttony and filth.

While the Cyclops is tending his herds the next day, Odysseus and his remaining men create a gigantic poker, which they conceal in the trash strewn about the cave. When the Cyclops returns that evening, Odysseus most deferentially offers him the wine meant to be an offering for those whom he had anticipated as hosts, and introduces himself as "Noman." The Cyclops greedily drinks the wine, which eventually lulls him to sleep, and then Odysseus and his men blind him with the poker.

The Cyclops bellows in pain, and when the other Cyclopes on the island come to learn what has happened, the Cyclops cries to them:

'O friends! 't is Noman who is killing me;
By treachery Noman kills me; none by force.' (*O*,
I.192)

The others, annoyed by the ruckus that was caused by no man, depart.

That night, Odysseus and his men cling the undersides of the herd. The next morning, as the sheep go outside:

. . . Carefully
The master [Cyclops] handled, though in grievous pain,
The back of every one that rose and passed,
Yet, slow of thought, perceived not that my men
Were clinging hid beneath their woolly breasts. (O,
I.194)

Odysseus and his men are thus freed, but as Odysseus sails away he shouts back at the blinded Cyclops:

'Cyclops, if any man of mortal birth
Note thine unseemly blindness, and inquire
The occasion, tell him that Laertes' son,
[Odysseus], the destroyer of walled towns,
Whose home is Ithaca, put out thine eye.' (O, I.196-7)

From this time forward, Odysseus learns never to reveal himself in so casual a manner. The Cyclops calls upon his father, Poseidon, to "grant that this [Odysseus] ne'er/May reach his native land!" (O, I.198). For several years afterwards, the Cyclops' curse remains in force. Odysseus loses his men and ships at sea and is repeatedly stranded in his attempts to reach home because Poseidon knows his identity and controls the waterways.

Odysseus is clever enough to escape the Cyclops' cave, but what can only be deemed hubris causes him trouble afterwards.

After his imprisonment and subsequent escape, Odysseus is extremely careful about revealing himself to both mortals and immortals. His incarceration and dearly won freedom alters him in two ways; he learns not to presume he is always a guest, and he learns not to reveal his true identity.

Huck is also imprisoned when his father holds him captive in a cabin in the woods. Pap Finn gets "too handy with his hick'ry," and eventually tries to kill Huck during an especially loathsome drinking binge (*AHF*, 27). Huck realizes that he must escape the cabin or perhaps be killed by his father, so he plots an escape plan that makes it seem as if he has been murdered. Huck waits until his father goes to town to sell a small log raft for drinking money, and then goes to work smashing in the cabin door and slaughtering a wild pig, among other activities. Huck successfully escapes and leaves behind him a bloody "crime scene" to make others think he is dead.

As with Odysseus, alcohol plays a large role in Huck gaining his freedom. Huck knows his father must eventually leave the cabin in order to obtain the alcohol that his body craves, which in turn allows Huck the time to construct a fake murder. Likewise, Odysseus plays upon the Cyclops' greed, which causes him to overdo and fall asleep.

The imprisonment ends in both cases because the hero is more clever than the jailer. The jailers Pap and Cyclops both hold the keys, the key to the cabin or the boulder in front of the cave, and they both are physically larger and stronger than

their prisoners. In addition, Odysseus is pitted against a being that was spawned by a deity, thus seemingly making him the less able in the match, as Odysseus is only mortal. Similarly, Huck is a mere boy, and his father's years of experience should make him the more capable of the two. Although Huck and Odysseus seemingly have the disadvantage, the Cyclops' gluttony and Pap Finn's weakness for alcohol give them the opportunity to escape.

The escape in both cases includes a clever plan, a manipulation of the captor's weakness, and interestingly enough, an acquisition of the captor's belongings when leaving. Both Huck and Odysseus take provisions when they leave their incarceration; Huck takes supplies from the cabin, and Odysseus takes several sheep to feed his men. Most importantly, however, the end of the incarceration in both cases marks the end of the heroes as they were. Huck is supposedly dead, so from that point on he is free to present himself to others under the identity of any boy (or girl) he wishes. Odysseus learns the danger of revealing himself after the Cyclops curses him, so he also fabricates new identities for himself. As Campbell states, the hero is reborn after the imprisonment, and Huck and Odysseus both emerge under new names and histories.

Jim also undergoes a negation of his identity, but as he is not the narrator of *AHF*, we are not privy to all the details of his escape. Jim, too, is imprisoned, but he is his own captor

in an attempt to escape the larger imprisonment of the society in which he lives. He explains his escape to Huck:

I tuck out en shin down de hill en 'spec to steal a skift 'long de sho' som'ers 'bove de town, but dey wuz people a-stirrin' yit, so I hid in de ole tumble-down cooper shop on de bank to wait for everybody to go 'way. Well, I wuz dah all night . . . [later] I laid dah under de shavins all day . . . when it come dark I tuck out up de river road.
(AHF, 48-9)

Jim stays hidden for a full twenty-four hours, and then makes his way to Jackson's Island, partly by hiding on a raft and partly by swimming while the debris in the river provides camouflage for him. The nature of Jim's escape is similar to his role in the novel -- he hides because he is escaping not one captor, but many. Therefore, Jim must necessarily play a more passive role in his journey by concealing himself from almost everyone.

Another similarity between the two texts is how ordinary men are transformed into beasts, figuratively or literally, because of insensible greed. The King becomes a technicolored creature in the "Royal Nonesuch," and as Huck describes him:

. . . the king come a-prancing out on all fours, naked; and he was painted all over, ring-streaked-and-striped, all sorts of colors, as splendid as a rainbow. And -- but never mind the rest of his outfit, it was just wild. (AHF, 166)

We have already examined how the King and Duke operate within the novel to make Huck aware of how chronic liars make unsavory companions, and the Royal Nonesuch operates as another means of making Huck and Jim clearly see the King and Duke for the "regular rascallions" they are (*AHF*, 168). The King and Duke's greed leads them to try their caper again, at which point they are both altered from their human state in the following manner:

here comes a raging rush of people, with torches, and an awful whooping and yelling, and banging tin pans and blowing horns; and we jumped to one side to let them go by; and as they went by, I see they had the king and the duke astraddle of a rail -- that is, I knowed it was the king and the duke, though they was all over tar and feathers, and didn't look like nothing in the world that was human -- just looked like a couple of monstrous big soldier-plumes. Well, it made me just sick to see it; and I was sorry for them poor pitiful rascals. (*AHF*, 253)

The mob and the King and Duke all operate in inhuman terms in this passage. The King and Duke "didn't look like nothing . . . that was human," and the mob is described as a "raging rush" that Huck and Tom have to jump away from to avoid being sucked in. There are several mobs in *AHF* that are described in similar terms -- as a beast in itself that usually operates in a cruel and inhuman fashion. The sheer strength of the huge crowd is what prompts the metamorphosis of the King and Duke into "monstrous big soldier-plumes."

Like the strength of the mob in *AHF*, Odysseus encounters a force much greater than himself in Circe, the witch. Several of

Odysseus' men go to Circe's stone house, and she invites them in, where they sit down to a feast she prepares of:

Pramnian wine with cheese,
Meal, and fresh honey, and infusing drugs
Into the mixture, -- drugs which made them lose
The memory of their home, -- she handed them
The beverage and they drank. Then instantly
She touched them with a wand, and shut them up
In sties, transformed them to swine in head and
voice,
Bristles and shape, though still the human mind
Remained to them. (O, I.210)

Unlike the lesson Odysseus learned at the Cyclops' cave, the men have not learned to be leery of strangers' hospitality. They eat freely at Circe's table, just as the King and Duke do not think twice about using the same scam in a new town. Circe transforms the men into swine, although they retain their former "human mind," just as the King and Duke are tarred and feathered by the sheer force of the angry mob, thereby becoming inhuman figures but internally remaining themselves.

Odysseus, with an herb given him by Hermes, follows his men to Circe's house but is not affected by her magic, thus she is forced to submit and return his men to him. Huck never sees the tarred and feathered King and Duke again, however. The circumstances are the same, regardless, for the hero in both cases sees firsthand how heedlessness and greed transformed their traveling companions into inhuman shapes.

The transformations of traveling companions can be compared directly to the hero's own transitional experience. Although

Campbell is focused on the hero's activities and does not address the errors that other travelers may make during the journey, such mistakes provide a means for us to see the incorrect path, so to speak. Huck's new moral awareness sets him apart from King and Duke's greediness, and Odysseus in his aloofness is distinct from the impetuous Ithacan men. The hero stands out as a better figure, and the contrast is made the more evident by the others' transformation from human to inhuman. Immediate gratifications or simple tests mark the downfall of the less capable travelers.

Campbell examines some of the difficulties a hero may encounter in a chapter subsection entitled "The Road of Trials." Of course, no journey would be complete without "trials," usually supernaturally imposed, and intended to teach the hero some lesson. Campbell laments the negation and/or denial of the hero journey archetype in today's analytical world with the following statement:

[T]he psychological dangers through which earlier generations were guided by the symbols and spiritual exercises of their mythological and religious inheritance, we today (in so far as we are unbelievers, or, if believers, in so far as our inherited beliefs fail to represent the real problems of contemporary life) must face alone, or, at best, with only tentative, impromptu, and not often very effective guidance. This is our problem as modern, "enlightened" individuals, for whom all gods and devils have been rationalized out of existence. Nevertheless, in the multitude of myths and legends that have been preserved to us, or collected from the ends of the earth, we may yet see delineated something of our still human course. (104-105)

Huck's voyage follows the patterns of previous hero journeys, although his trials are "realistic," his journey is "lifelike," and his guiding force, the Mississippi, is a real river. We have examined some general similarities between Huck and Odysseus' stories, as well as demonstrated how Huck's imprisonment led to his journey and subsequent moral transition. Now we shall examine a specific "trial" that Huck, Jim, and Odysseus all endured.

Odysseus encounters many monsters during his voyage, and Huck and Jim likewise meet with a monster that destroys their raft:

We could hear her pounding along, but we didn't see her good till she was close. She aimed right for us. Often they do that and try to see how close they can come without touching; sometimes the wheel bites off a sweep, and then the pilot sticks his head out and laughs, and thinks he's mighty smart. Well, here she comes, and we said she was going to try to shave us; but she didn't seem to be sheering off a bit. She was a big one, and she was coming in a hurry, too, looking like a black cloud with rows of glow-worms around it; but all of a sudden she bulged out, big and scary, with a long row of wide-open furnace doors shining like red-hot teeth, and her monstrous bows and guards hanging right over us. There was a yell at us, and a jingling of bells to stop the engines, a pow-wow of cussing, and whistling of steam -- and as Jim went overboard on one side and I on the other, she comes smashing straight through the raft. (AHF, 104)

The "monster" in this case is a steamboat, one of the real-life menaces on the Mississippi's waters. Symbolically, as Jonathan

Raban states, "the steamboat [in *AHF* is] a dramatically vicious emblem of the society of the river," and it is only by avoiding such large craft that Huck and Jim can remain literally safe on their raft (36). This particular steamboat follows in a long tradition of monsters, because it is "big and scary" with a "long row of wide-open furnace doors shining like red-hot teeth" and "monstrous bows and guards hanging" over the raft. Huck and Jim's monster is generally read in a literal fashion, however, mainly because steamboats were a real means of transportation and a real menace, but if we read this passage properly we can avoid "rationalizing" the monster "out of existence."

For instance, the steamboat that destroys Huck and Jim's raft is described in strikingly similar terms to the like-gendered Scylla in the *Odyssey*. Scylla also swoops down from above on her prey, with fangs bared. As Circe explains to Odysseus:

. . . There Scylla dwells,
 And fills the air with fearful yells; her voice
 The cry of whelps just littered, but herself
 A frightful prodigy, -- a sight which none
 Would care to look on, though he were a god.
 Twelve feet are hers, all shapeless; six long
 necks,
 A hideous head on each, and triple rows
 Of teeth, close set and many, threatening death.
 And half her form is in the cavern's womb,
 And forth from that dark gulf her heads are thrust,
 To look abroad upon the rocks for prey
 . . . No mariner can boast
 That he has passed by Scylla with a crew
 Unharmed; she snatches from the deck, and bears
 Away in each grim mouth, a living man. (*O*, I.256)

The pounding steamboat that lunges down on Huck and Jim is quite similar to the noisy Scylla who swoops down to devour her prey.

The comparison does not end there, however, for alongside the Scylla there dwells the Charybdis:

Below, Charybdis, of immortal birth,
 Draws the dark water down; for thrice a day
 She gives it forth, and thrice with fearful whirl
 She draws it in. O, be it not thy lot
 To come while the dark water rushes down! (O,
 I.256)

Twain incorporated Charybdis into the passage with the monster-steamboat as well. Huck states:

I dived -- and I aimed to find the bottom, too, for a thirty-foot wheel had got to go over me, and I wanted it to have plenty of room . . . Then I bounced for the top in a hurry, for I was nearly busting . . . Of course there was a booming current; and of course the boat started her engines again ten seconds after she stopped them, for they never cared much for raftsmen; so now she was churning along up the river, out of sight in the thick weather, though I could hear her. (AHF, 104)

Huck must avoid being sucked into the steamboat's wheel after avoiding the first hazard, the steamboat's prow, just as Odysseus encounters a dual threat in both Scylla and Charybdis. In a sense, Huck does descend into the Charybdis, because he dives to try to "find the bottom," and then he is "bounced" back up to the top, just as the Charybdis will suck a ship down into its depths for a time and then spew it back up.

These passages with their monsters are so similar that we see that Campbell's "gods and devils" and "myths and legends" remain preserved in different forms. Contemporary stories are simply subtler, and the good and bad in them may not be as obvious as in the past. *AHF* fits many of Campbell's criteria for a hero journey, although we must bear in mind that Campbell's work is not meant to be exclusive, but to be used as an interpretive device. *AHF* also bears many similarities to an established epic, the *Odyssey*. It is evident that Twain used several traditional motifs in his novel, as we see when fitting *AHF* into the hero archetype that Joseph Campbell proposes; as we see when comparing the Mississippi to other symbolic waterways; and as we see when we compare *AHF* to the *Odyssey*. *AHF* remains a distinctly American work, however, just as the *Odyssey* remains an illustration of its day. *AHF*'s heroes embody a portion of our culture and the ideals of our nation, and its ending remains open, as does our future.

CHAPTER 6. CONCLUSION

It is difficult to tell whether Twain was influenced by other texts, whether he was working with an unconscious archetype, or both when he wrote *AHF*. These questions will never be answered conclusively. Regardless, Twain follows in a long line of authors who used specific motifs as part of a larger journey narrative. When examined one-on-one with the *Odyssey*, we can clearly see that *AHF*'s structure and storyline give it a strong affiliation with other epic works; indeed, it shows itself as an American epic. Joseph Campbell provides an interpretive device that can be used to illustrate *AHF* within a hero journey archetype. If we choose to view *AHF*'s Mississippi in a symbolic sense, we realize that it, too, follows both secular and religious patterns of waterways in the past. In all cases, we must shed our preconceptions of Twain and view his work from a more distant angle. If we knew nothing of Twain the man, we would most likely not question *AHF*'s standing as a classic text and an American epic.

There are several difficulties in defining an American epic. One is the hero -- how can we create an epic hero that includes all of American culture? Another is the destiny of America -- how can a work conclusively describe something that is still proceeding? *AHF* successfully fulfills these requirements in its multi-cultural characters, in the ideas and

values held by these characters, and in its inconclusive ending. Huck is free of his father and Jim is his own master, but the story implicitly continues beyond the attainment of their goals.

Twain used black slave and poor white to create his "portrait of America," but in these characters and their adventures we may see many angles of past and present American life. Odysseus, on the other hand, represented an ideal for an essentially homogenous society. It is simpler to mark the boundaries of a person's worth in a society that does not rely on the importance of each individual. Odysseus is a nobleman and therefore is privy to the liberties afforded by his station. Huck and Jim's motivation is to attain those same liberties even though they were not born into the position. Their immediate society does contain rigid restrictions for individuals, but their story transcends the master/slave relationship and instead incorporates an ideal upon which America was founded, i.e. the freedom of the individual in a democratic society.

Odysseus' story also ends on a conclusive note. The gods decree that the fighting amongst the Ithacans shall stop, and as a result Odysseus' future will be peaceful and happy, just as it was foretold. How can one write a neat ending to America's expansion? Our nation is young and continues to evolve. Odysseus' future seems easily defined, Huck's is not.

This thesis has explored several ways to read *AHF* in a new light. It has viewed Twain's novel as an imaginative and creative text -- a contemporary hero journey complete with

trials, growth, and self-discovery. It has showcased *AHF* as an American epic by using various interpretive devices, such as a one-to-one comparison with sections of Homer's *Odyssey*. In addition, this thesis has given some much needed attention to Jim as a crucial character in the novel. Together, Huck and Jim reflect some of the past as well as the future of our nation in Twain's magnificent American epic.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Abrams, M. H. *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, Sixth Edition. Fort Worth, TX: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich College Publishers, 1985.
- Baldanza, Frank. "The Structure of *Huckleberry Finn*." In Richard Lettis, Robert F. McDonnell, and William E. Morris, eds. *Huck Finn and His Critics*. New York, NY: The MacMillan Company, 1962. pp. 371-379.
- Baldick, Chris. *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1990.
- Banta, Martha. "Escape and Entry in *Huckleberry Finn*." *Modern Fiction Studies* 14(1968): 79-91.
- Barrow, David. "The Bound Apprentice." *Mark Twain Journal* 29(Spring 1991): 13-21.
- Bell, Michael Davitt. "Mark Twain, 'Realism,' and *Huckleberry Finn*." In Louis J. Budd, ed. *New Essays on Huckleberry Finn*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1985. pp. 35-59.
- Bellamy, Gladys Carmen. *Mark Twain as a Literary Artist*. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1950.
- Bellamy, Gladys Carmen. "Roads to Freedom." In Claude M. Simpson, ed. *Twentieth Century Interpretations of Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1968. pp. 16-25.
- Bendixen, Alfred. "Huck Finn and Pilgrim's Progress." *Mark Twain Journal* 18(1976): 21.
- Branch, Edgar M. "Mark Twain: The Pilot and the Writer." *Mark Twain Journal* 23(Fall 1985): 28-43.
- Bridgman, Richard. *Traveling In Mark Twain*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1987.
- Brodwin, Stanley. "The Useful and the Useless River: *Life on the Mississippi* Revisited." *Studies in American Humor* 2(1976): 196-208.
- Brooks, Van Wyck. Excerpt from "The Ordeal of Mark Twain." In Richard Lettis, Robert F. McDonnell, and William E. Morris, eds. *Huck Finn and His Critics*. New York, NY: The MacMillan Company, 1962. pp. 284-296.

- Burde, Edgar J. "Mark Twain: The Writer as Pilot." *PMLA* 93(1978): 878-92.
- Campbell, Joseph. *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1968.
- Champion, Laurie, ed. *The Critical Response to Mark Twain's Huckleberry Finn*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1991.
- Chevalier, Jean and Alain Gheerbrant. *A Dictionary of Symbols*. Translated by John Buchanan-Brown. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Reference, 1994.
- Clemens, Suzy. *Papa: An Intimate Biography of Mark Twain*. Edited and with an Introduction by Charles Neider. Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1985.
- Clerc, Charles. "Sunrise on the River: 'The Whole World' of Huckleberry Finn." *Modern Fiction Studies* 14(1968): 67-78.
- Cox, Clinton. *Mark Twain: America's Humorist, Dreamer, Prophet*. New York, NY: Scholastic Press, Inc., 1995.
- Cuddon, J. A. *A Dictionary of Literary Terms*, Third Edition. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Reference, 1991.
- Cummings, Sherwood. "Mark Twain's Theory of Realism; or The Science of Piloting." *Studies in American Humor* 2(1976): 209-221.
- Davis, Steve. "Mark Twain, the War, and Life on the Mississippi." *Southern Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal of the South* 18(Summer 1979): 231-239.
- De Voto, Bernard. *Mark Twain in Eruption*. New York, NY: Harper and Row Publishers, 1940.
- De Voto, Bernard. "Mark Twain's America." In Richard Lettis, Robert F. McDonnell, and William E. Morris, eds. *Huck Finn and His Critics*. New York, NY: The MacMillan Company, 1962. pp. 307-316.
- Diel, Paul. *Le Symbolisme dans la Mythologie Grecque*. Paris: Petit Bibliotheque Payot, 1966.
- Eliot, T. S. From an "Introduction" to *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. In Claude M. Simpson, ed. *Twentieth Century Interpretations of Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1968. pp. 107-108.

- Farrell, James T. "The League of Frightened Philistines." In Richard Lettis, Robert F. McDonnell, and William E. Morris, eds. *Huck Finn and His Critics*. New York, NY: The MacMillan Company, 1962. pp. 321-326.
- Fiedler, Leslie. "Come Back to the Raft Ag'in, Huck Honey!" In Laurie Champion, ed. *The Critical Response to Mark Twain's Huckleberry Finn*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1991. pp. 39-43.
- Gribben, Alan. *Mark Twain's Library: A Reconstruction*, Volumes I and II. Boston, MA: G.K. Hall & Company, 1980.
- Harris, Susan K. *Mark Twain's Escape from Time: A Study of Patterns and Images*. Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1982.
- Homer. *Odyssey*, Volumes I and II. Translated by William Cullen Bryant. Boston, MA: James R. Osgood and Company, 1873.
- Homer. *Odyssey*. Translated by Robert Fitzgerald. New York, NY: Doubleday, 1963.
- Hoy, James F. "The Grangerford-Shepherdson Feud in Huckleberry Finn." *Mark Twain Journal* 16(1977): 19-20.
- Holoka, James P. "Lying to Laertes, a Gorgeous Triumph -- Homer and Twain." *Classical and Modern Literature: A Quarterly* 5(Summer 1985): 301-304.
- Jung, Carl G. *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*. Translated by R. F. C. Hull. New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 1959.
- Kaplan, Justin. *Mr. Clemens and Mark Twain*. New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1966.
- Khoury, Nadia. "From Eden to the Dark Ages: Images of History in the Work of Mark Twain." *The Canadian Review of American Studies* 11(Fall 1980): 151-174.
- Kiskis, Michael J. *Mark Twain's Own Autobiography: The Chapters from the North American Review*. Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1990.
- Knapp, Bettina L. *A Jungian Approach to Literature*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1984.
- Kolve, V. A. "The Man of Law's Tale: The Rudderless Ship and the Sea." In *Chaucer and the Imagery of Narrative: The First Five Canterbury Tales*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1984. pp. 297-358.

- Kravitz, Bennett. *Dreaming Mark Twain*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, Inc., 1996.
- LaHood, Marvin I. "Huck Finn's Search for Identity." *Mark Twain Journal* 13(1967): 11-14.
- Lane, Lauriat Jr. "Why *Huckleberry Finn* Is a Great World Novel." *College English* 17(October 1955): 1-5.
- Lauber, John. *The Making of Mark Twain*. New York, NY: American Heritage Press, Inc., 1985.
- Leonard, James S., Thomas A. Tenney, and Thadious M. Davis, eds. *Satire or Evasion? Black Perspectives on Huckleberry Finn*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1992.
- Lettis, Richard, Robert F. McDonnell, and William E. Morris, eds. *Huck Finn and His Critics*. New York, NY: The Macmillan Company, 1962.
- Marx, Leo. "Mr. Eliot, Mr. Trilling, and *Huckleberry Finn*." In Richard Lettis, Robert F. McDonnell, and William E. Morris, eds. *Huck Finn and His Critics*. New York, NY: The MacMillan Company, 1962. pp. 350-365.
- Meltzer, Milton. *Mark Twain Himself: A Pictorial Biography*. New York, NY: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1960.
- O'Connor, William Van. "Why *Huckleberry Finn* Is Not the Great American Novel." *College English* 17(October 1955): 6-10.
- Paine, Albert Bigelow. "Huck Finn Comes into His Own." In Richard Lettis, Robert F. McDonnell, and William E. Morris, eds. *Huck Finn and His Critics*. New York, NY: The MacMillan Company, 1962. pp. 278-283.
- Perry, T. S. "Mark Twain." In Richard Lettis, Robert F. McDonnell, and William E. Morris, eds. *Huck Finn and His Critics*. New York, NY: The MacMillan Company, 1962. pp. 276-278.
- Pritchett, V. S. "Cruelty in the *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*." In Richard Lettis, Robert F. McDonnell, and William E. Morris, eds. *Huck Finn and His Critics*. New York, NY: The MacMillan Company, 1962. pp. 317-321.
- Raban, Jonathan. *Mark Twain: Huckleberry Finn*. London, UK: Edward Arnold, Ltd., 1968.
- Rasmussen, R. Kent. *Mark Twain A to Z*. New York, NY: Facts on File, Inc., 1995.

Robinson, T. M. *Heraclitus Fragments: A Text and Translation with Commentary by T. M. Robinson*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987.

Rubenstein, Gilbert M. "The Moral Structure of *Huckleberry Finn*." In Claude M. Simpson, ed. *Twentieth Century Interpretations of Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1968. pp. 54-60.

Shear, Walter. "Twain's Early Writing and Theories of Realism." *Midwest Quarterly* 30(Autumn 1988): 93-103.

Smiley, Jane. "Say It Ain't So, Huck: Second thoughts on Mark Twain's 'masterpiece.'" *Harper's Magazine* 292(January 1996): 61-67.

Stephens, George D. "Huckleberry Finn as a Journey." *Mark Twain Journal* 13(1966): 11-15.

Terpening, Ronnie H. *Charon and the Crossing: Ancient, Medieval, and Renaissance Transformations of a Myth*. Cranbury, NJ: Bucknell University Press, 1985.

Trachtenberg, Alan. "The Form of Freedom in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*." In Laurie Champion, ed. *The Critical Response to Mark Twain's Huckleberry Finn*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1991. pp. 87-98.

Trilling, Lionel. From an "Introduction" to *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. In Richard Lettis, Robert F. McDonnell, and William E. Morris, eds. *Huck Finn and His Critics*. New York, NY: The MacMillan Company, 1962. pp. 326-337.

Twain, Mark. *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Edited and with an Introduction by Gerald Graff and James Phelan. New York, NY: Bedford Books of St. Martin's Press, 1995.

Twain, Mark. *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Edited and with an Introduction by John Seelye. New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1985.

Twain, Mark. *Life on the Mississippi*. Edited and with an Afterward by Leonard Kriegel. New York, NY: The New American Library, 1961.

Watkins, T. H. *Mark Twain's Mississippi*. Palo Alto, CA: American West Publishing Company, 1974.